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ABSTRACT

There are two major categories of writing, expository and creative. Expository writing includes descriptive writing (description, report, taking notes, outline, exposition, summary, letter, diary, telegram, and minutes) and argumentative writing (argumentation, essay, and comment). Creative writing includes poem, narration, tale, slogan, decalogue, proverb, epitaph, joke, funny story, gag, and dialogue. There are three major categories of skills required in writing: base skills, argumentative skills, and creative skills. Base skills include expressing oneself, sequentializing, synthesizing, explaining and defining, gathering documentary evidence, and comparing and classifying. Argumentative skills include determining cause and effect relationships, defending each thesis or statement, and selecting specific text structures. Creative skills include inventing, using indirect language, and making associations. A curriculum in teaching writing should include several writing modes, particularly the major ones since they develop the fundamental writing skills, and should introduce the modes in progressive order according to their complexity. (A graph showing the complex relationships between the writing modes and skills required for them is included.) (JL)

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Methodology for Planning Curricula in Teaching Writing

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1. Abstract

In this paper, a methodology is presented for deriving progressive curricula in teaching writing. The basic assumption is that the use of several writing modes (such as summaries, slogans, dialogues...) can improve writing ability, and that they can be progressively taught according to their difficulty [Coop 78] [Glat 80] [Camp 82]. Writing modes are classified, and the skills which they require are listed. A representation of skills and writing modes is given using a directed graph; skills and writing modes are the nodes of the graph, and the edges represent precedences between writing modes, or the required skills. Planning a curriculum that includes some specific writing modes corresponds to following one of the possible paths of the graph that includes the corresponding nodes.

2. Writing modes

Writings are classified according to their textual genre. Other possible classification criteria, such as the dependence on the audience or the type of instruction - stimulation given to the writer, are not considered in this paper (see [Emig 71], [Appl 81], [Brit 75], [Mart 76]).
Writing modes are classified into 2 major categories: expository writing and creative writing. In the former, the focus is on research, selection, organization and presentation of information; in the latter, fantasy and creativity, content, and textual structure are in the foreground. Expository writing is further divided into descriptive writing and argumentative writing. Descriptive writing stresses the "objects" rather than the viewpoint from which they are observed; argumentative writing, on the contrary, stresses the opinion of the writer. In the following, several writing modes are listed; major types are in boldface.

A) EXPOSITORY WRITING

A.1 DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Description
Report
Taking Notes
Outline
Exposition
Summary
Letter

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Diary
Telegram
Minutes

A.2 ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Argumentation
Essay
Comment

B) CREATIVE WRITING

Poem
Narration
Tale
Slogan
Decalogue
Proverb
Epitaph
Joke, funny story, gag
Dialogue

3. Skills required in writing

The skills which are taken into consideration in this section refer to very general abstract abilities [Lowe 81], while the specific conventional skills which are required by each particular writing mode are disregarded. Skills are classified into 3 major categories: base skills, argumentative skills and creative skills. They correspond to descriptive, argumentative and creative writing respectively. In the following, skills required in writing are listed and briefly described.

A) BASE SKILLS

1) Expressing oneself: naming objects, building kernel sentences. Necessary for describing physical objects.

2) Sequentializing: introducing objects of different types in a list according to a spatial and temporal order, in a paratactic way. Necessary, for instance, in a travel report.

3) Synthesyzing: reducing and putting in a hierarchy the items of information. Necessary in taking notes and in summarizing.

4) Explaining, defining: introducing complex, unknown or unusual objects, events, actions, ideas, problems in a rigorous and systematic way. Necessary for any controversial or complex discussion, debate or discourse.

5) Gathering documentary evidence: finding the required information from books, magazines, interviews. Creating a bibliography.

6) Comparing and classifying: systematizing objects, feelings, situations, problems and ideas into models, frames, pictures.

B) ARGUMENTATIVE SKILLS

1) Determining cause-effect relationships: showing causal relationships between events.

2) Defending a thesis or statement: showing own opinions or criticzing opposite opinions. Requires the ability of reasoning, logics and rhetoric.

3) Selecting specific text structures: using a specific genre of text. For example, consider scientific or editorial writing.

C) CREATIVE SKILLS

1) Inventing: going out of everyday scripts, creating new objects, persons or situations or new combinations of world's elements, arranging items of information into new formats.

2) Using indirect language: using metaphors and any non predictable word or word combination.

3) Making associations: associate words and images in an unusual way.

4. Graph of writing modes and skills

A graph is used to show the complex relationships between writing modes and skills that are required for them; the graph helps to develop a simple methodology for determining curricula in teaching writing.

The graph is constituted of nodes and of directed edges. Nodes represent writing modes and skills; in fig. 1, rectangles are used for representing writing modes, and circles are used for representing skills. There are two types of edges, between skills and writing modes or between writing modes respectively. Edges between skills and writing modes represent the skills which are required for each writing mode, while edges between writing modes represent the "precedence" between them. The notion of precedence used in this paper is the following: one writing mode precedes another one when the latter requires all the skills which are required by the former. Thus, the skills required by each writing mode are given by the union of the skills directly connected to it and the skills required by all the preceding writing modes.

For example, a **description** precedes all other kinds of writing, because any type of writing requires the basic ability of **expression**; a **report** requires the additional skill of **sequentializing** inmodeion, and a **narration** requires the additional skill of being able to **invent**; thus description precedes report, and report in turn precedes narration.

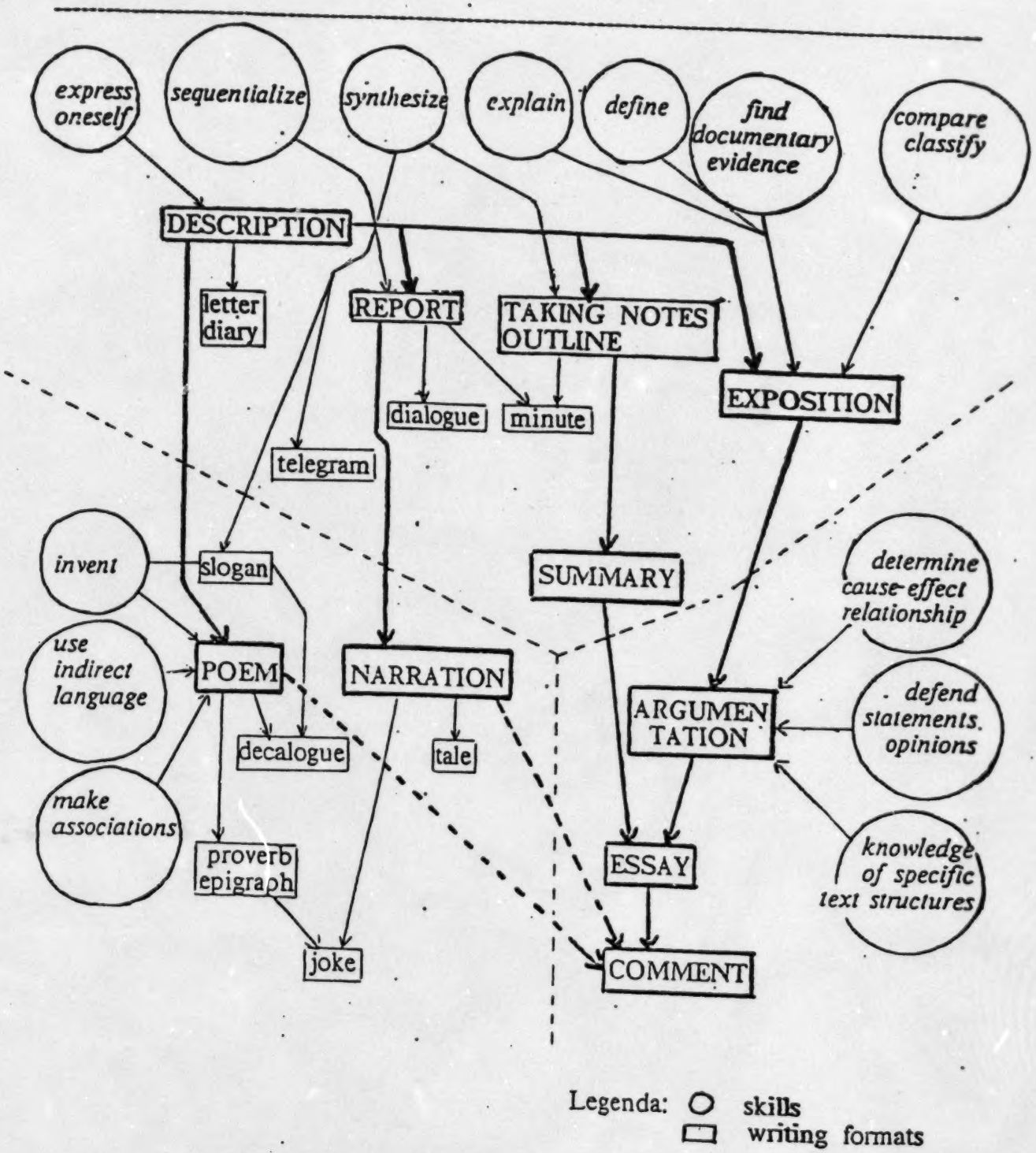

Fig. 1 Graph showing the relationships between writing formats and required skills

Boldface arrows show the precedences among the major writing modes, which should be included in any comprehensive curriculum of writing. The other writing modes do not require skills which are not also required by the major writing modes; typically, these writing modes should be used as a support of the major ones and as a source for exercises.

The graph is divided by dotted lines into three major areas, including descriptive, argumentative and creative writings and skills. The graph shows that descriptive skills are sufficient for any descriptive writing, while argumentative or creative writing require some descriptive skill. All the edges crossing the boundaries between areas connect descriptive writing to argumentative and creative writing, with the exception of two dotted edges connecting respectively poem and narration to comment. These arrows reflect the author's opinion that it is better to let each student practice writing their own poems or narration according to some style, before writing a comment on writing of that particular style.

5. How to construct a curriculum

In order to establish a criteria for the construction of teaching writing curricula, the following assumptions are made:
1. a curriculum in teaching writing should include several writing modes in order to enrich students' writing capabilities
2. it should include the major writing modes, as they develop the fundamental writing skills
3. writing modes should be introduced in progressive order according to their complexity; as a consequence, writing ability should also develop progressively [Sieg 80].

Any curriculum which introduces writing modes according to an existing path along the graph and includes the major writing modes is consistent with these assumptions. A path on the graph has the following meaning: it is not possible to reach a node (i.e., to teach a writing mode) if all the nodes along the input edges of that node have not yet been reached (i.e. preceding writing modes have already been taught). An example of curriculum for teaching writing is the following:

description -> letter -> **report** -> dialogue -> **taking notes** -> slogan -> **poem** -> proverb -> joke -> **summary** -> **exposition** -> **narration** -> **argumentation** -> **essay** -> **comment**

Notice that the graph does not establish a total ordering of writing modes, but rather a partial ordering of them; thus, several curricula can be obtained which are consistent with the graph, and reflect the peculiar viewpoint of the teacher. However, the graph shows that some curricula are not progressive, or that they are limited because they do not consider possible writing modes.

A future extension of this methodology will use a computer in order to select a curriculum which includes the writing modes specified by teachers. The computer program will take as parameters the already acquired skills from each individual student or from the average of the class, the expected level of apprenticeship, and the

time schedule of the course [Bloo 71]. The objective of the program will be to include in the curriculum those writing modes which are specified by the teacher. It will be possible to formulate the selection of the "optimal" teaching writing curriculum as an optimization problem on the graph and to produce the curriculum as a result of the optimization, along with precise references to textbooks and exercises.

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